

time a new machine took over the work that formerly required many men?

Numerous labor problems have risen directly out of the use of machines. Machines have speeded up work to such a degree that work is sometimes beyond the endurance of the laborer. A laborer must either keep up with the machine, or drop out and make way for a faster worker. Machines have forced the great mass of workers to do monotonous work. Workers stand before a machine and adjust its parts, or they inspect the articles which the machine has turned out by the thousands. How may the man or woman tending a machine overcome the endless fatigue of its monotony?

The use of machines for fine work has also decreased the need for highly skilled labor. In the early days the hand weaver, the

Human labor is symbolized by the toil of this steelworker in the glow of molten metal

Photo by Philip Gendreau



tailor, the blacksmith, the watchmaker, and other handicraft workmen had to be persons of experience and skill. In many modern factories a workman, after a few hours of training, is ready to take another workman's place at a machine. Many jobs, although not entirely unskilled, can be learned in a few weeks. The workman who quits a semiskilled or unskilled job knows that his place can easily be filled.

With the development of mass production and large corporations, the outlook of the working man has changed. A century ago it was common for an employee to look forward to the time when he would be able to go into business for himself. Even with little capital, he might start a business of his own. Now the hope of ever owning a business has almost disappeared among the great mass of employees. This change has caused a very large number of people to develop a labor consciousness. They have little hope that they, or their children, will cease to be dependent on wages as their only means of income.

In the days when industrial workers were few in number, when an employer had only a dozen employees, he knew each employee individually. The employer frequently worked with his men and saw problems from their viewpoint as well as from his own. There was a close personal relationship between employer and employee.

But as factories and corporations increased in number and as they grew larger and larger in size, the employer lost sight of the individual worker. A group of officers and stockholders replaced the individual owner as employer. The officers knew little about the employees. They dealt with labor in the mass. If conditions in a factory were poor, the officers might not know it because factory conditions did not affect sales. Sales were made in distant places to people who knew nothing of the conditions under which the goods were produced.

The individual laborer was no match for the well-to-do employer or for the large corporation. To the company which employed thousands of laborers, each laborer added but little to the efficiency of the company. To the laborer himself, a job was likely to be his only means of support. Under such circumstances, the individual workman was in no position to bargain for better conditions. Threat of unemployment, if not actual starvation, caused him to take what was offered.